

Hepatitis B

Patient Fact Sheet

Overview

Hepatitis B is a serious disease caused by a virus that attacks the liver. The virus, which is called hepatitis B virus (HBV), can cause lifelong infection, cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver, liver cancer, liver failure, and death. You can get hepatitis B through contact with the blood of a person who has the disease. You can also get hepatitis B through contact with other body fluids like semen and vaginal fluids. For example, you can get hepatitis B by having sex or sharing needles with a person who has the disease. Hepatitis B vaccine is available to prevent HBV infection.

Hepatitis B vaccine

Vaccination for hepatitis B is given as an injection in the upper arm and requires more than one dose.

If you need hepatitis A vaccination in addition to hepatitis B, you can do these individually or as a combined vaccine that covers both.

You may need the vaccination against hepatitis B if any of these are true for you:

- are age 19 to 59 years and have not previously been vaccinated against hepatitis B virus
- are at increased risk for infection with hepatitis B virus (see below)
- have chronic liver disease
- seek protection from hepatitis B infection

Increased risk includes:

- household contacts of HBV-infected persons
- sexual contacts of HBV-infected persons
- persons who have shared needles with HBV-infected persons
- current or previous injection-drug use

- sexually active persons with more than one sex partner (i.e., in the past 6 months), or with a non-monogamous partner
- men who have sex with men
- persons seeking evaluation or treatment for a sexually transmitted infection (STI)
- persons with HIV infection
- persons with diabetes who are under the age of 60 (adults with diabetes who are older than 60 may choose to be vaccinated)
- persons with end-stage renal disease on dialysis or expected to be on dialysis
- health care personnel, public safety workers, and other persons with risk for exposure to blood or other potentially infectious body fluids
- residents and staff in care facilities for developmentally disabled persons
- residents in correctional facilities
- travelers to countries with high or intermediate prevalence of HBV infection

Do I need to be tested for hepatitis B before getting the vaccination?

In some cases, your provider may decide to test your blood for antibodies to hepatitis B, but this is not mandatory for everyone.

If the test shows that you have antibodies to hepatitis B, it means that you were infected with hepatitis B in the past, have current hepatitis B infection, or you were previously vaccinated for hepatitis B. It is important to discuss the results of your test with your provider. If you already have antibodies to hepatitis B, you don't need to get hepatitis B vaccination.



What should you do if exposed to the hepatitis B virus?

If you know you were recently exposed to the hepatitis B virus, you may get protection from an injection of hepatitis B immunoglobulin (HBIG), which is different from hepatitis B vaccine. HBIG is given only when it is suspected or known that someone has been infected with hepatitis B, and it is given within 24 hours after the exposure. HBIG will protect you for 3 to 6 months, but it is strongly recommended that you also begin the hepatitis B vaccination series within 7 days of your exposure.

What are the side effects of the hepatitis B vaccine?

There are very few side effects caused by the vaccine, but you may experience soreness at the injection site. You will NOT get hepatitis B from the vaccine. Pregnant women have received the hepatitis B vaccine with no risk to their babies.

Who can I contact for more information?

Talk to your VA provider and visit www.hepatitis.va.gov



More information is also available from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd/hepb